

Eshoo Calls for Expansion of 211 Service to All Americans

Sunnyvale, Calif.

- Rep. Anna G. Eshoo held a press conference today with United Ways of California to highlight her Calling For 2-1-1 Act (H.R. 211) and to urge passage of the legislation. The bill will provide federal support for the 211 information and referral telephone service and expand its availability across the country.

"211 helps connect millions of Americans every year with an array of essential programs, from health services to housing assistance. Almost 10 years after it was designated, the 2-1-1 number only reaches two-thirds of the U.S. population and includes less than half the counties in California. I've authored the Calling For 2-1-1 Act to expand this critical service to all Americans and ensure it continues to provide a valuable lifeline for decades to come," Rep. Eshoo said.

2-1-1 numbers provide individuals and families with immediate referrals and connections to federal, regional or local services, from mental health programs to childcare resources, domestic violence shelters and financial counseling centers. During disasters, 211 offers critical information about evacuation routes, food, and shelter, as well as support for finding long-term recovery services. Whenever the Bay Area faces its next major earthquake, 211 could radically improve communications for residents and take pressure off overburdened 911 emergency lines.

The bill has already secured 243 bipartisan cosponsors in the House and 61 in the Senate-more than enough for passage-but it will expire if it does not come up for a vote before the end of the year.

"I've worked hard to make sure the bill has the votes it needs to pass. Now I'm working closely with Speaker Pelosi and Chairman Waxman of the House Energy and Commerce to bring up the bill for a vote this year, preferably prior to our August recess," Rep. Eshoo said. "People across the country can help with this effort by calling their legislators and asserting that 211 is a priority for their communities."

Peter Manzo, CEO of United Ways of California underscored the importance of the Act to expand 211 service statewide: "Without federal funding, current plans to

expand 211 to the entire state of California cannot move forward. Right now, 211 is available in counties with large urban centers. Rural counties, where health and human services are more scarce, are in even greater need of 211 to connect people with help. These rural counties also lack the funding resources necessary to support 211 service."

Carole Leigh Hutton, CEO of United Way Silicon Valley, which operates 211 Santa Clara County, said, "211 answered more than 200,000 calls in the Bay Area last year and more than 16 million nationwide. Calls to 211 have surged, up 50% since the economic crisis began. 211 is a critical driver for economic recovery in our region - and across the nation - for Americans who need to connect with community services to help rebuild their lives. To ensure the long-term sustainability of 211, this federal funding partnership is critical. We at United Way urge Congress to take the important step of ratifying this bill before the August recess."

Anne Wilson, CEO of United Way of the Bay Area, which operates 211 in five Bay Area counties, said, "211 is serving as a life line for struggling families during these tough times. All people, everywhere, need to be able to dial 211 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to get the help they need in the event of a personal crisis or a regional disaster. This can only happen if H.R. 211 passes this year. Without federal funding, expanding our 211 call centers to adequately serve growing needs will be a significant challenge."

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